

## AMERICAN EUGENICS SOCIETY

# Statement of the Eugenic Position

By the Special Committee of the Board of Directors\*

**T**HE AMERICAN EUGENICS SOCIETY is composed largely of scientists from a number of different disciplines. Their common interest is to promote the advancement, discussion and dissemination of scientific knowledge of human genetics, as it relates to the welfare and improvement of individuals and populations.

### The Present State of Knowledge

Recent advances in the field of genetics make the times particularly appropriate for the activities of such a society. In the past decade or two, human genetics has made notable advances as a field of study. It has contributed new insights into the past and present evolution of man. Great strides have been made in analyzing the causes and inheritance of constitutional diseases. We have come to realize that genes which cause defects are not limited to the afflicted families, but that many such genes are spread widely throughout the population. We have learned that the genetic consequences of artificial radiation, of life-saving influences in medicine, and of new migration and marriage patterns are reflected in an accumulation of deleterious genes over and above the subtle equilibrium previously established by natural forces. Methods are being devised to detect the individuals who are carriers of genes that cause defects as well as to treat some of the defects at an early age. Increasing medical knowledge and increasing public interest have led to the establishment of heredity counselling centres, and to a new recognition of the importance of heredity in human affairs.

The genetic mechanisms related to intelligence and personality are as yet little understood.

It seems certain that there are many genes involved, but the number and the method of transmission are not known. Much further research is needed to find out in what way and to what extent differences in intelligence and personality are determined by variations in genetic factors. Their outward (phenotypic) manifestation is the combined result of the interaction of a specific heredity with a specific environment.

Studies over the past thirty-five years have contributed convincing evidence that variations in genetic factors do have a part in determining individual variations in intelligence and personality. Studies have been made on identical twins reared at home or reared apart, on siblings, on adopted children reared in homes and in institutions, and on random pairs. When the environment is closely similar, there are still large individual differences, which are best explained by heredity. On the other hand, when heredity is held constant and the environment varied, there are still large differences, which must be accounted for by differences in the environments. Psychological and sociological studies hold an important place in advancing knowledge of the part played by genetic factors, of the distribution of these factors in the population, of the regularity of their expression in diverse environments, and of their significance to human societies.

### The Role of the American Eugenics Society

The function of the American Eugenics Society is to contribute to the advancement and dissemination of knowledge about human genetics particularly in relation to similar scientific knowledge from the social and biological sciences, including knowledge of the social and psychological factors which determine size of family among different kinds of couples. The

\* Gordon Allen, Dudley Kirk, J. P. Scott, Harry L. Shapiro, Bruce Wallace. Reprinted from *Eugenics Quarterly*, December 1961. 8, 4.

Society's function is therefore to a great extent interdisciplinary.

The Society has a special part to play in enlarging the interests of various professional groups, especially in fields where there is an awakening scientific interest. When, after the Second World War, the medical profession began to be interested in genetics, the Eugenics Society's most successful work was in that field. The *Eugenics Quarterly* provided opportunities for publication of articles dealing with human populations in the broadest sense, at a time when other journals were not looking for papers of this sort. The Society's five fellowships in medical genetics were among the first to result in assignments to full-time teaching and research in genetics at major medical schools. Several conferences on medical genetic subjects and on the teaching of medical genetics were directly sponsored or primarily stimulated by the Society. The Society's publications and conferences on heredity counselling have received extensive notice in both professional and lay circles. The importance of medical genetics is now widely recognized and is getting support from the medical schools, from foundations, and from the government through the National Institutes of Health. The Society feels satisfaction in having played some part in this important advance in the field of eugenics.

Psychologists, sociologists and demographers are now showing interest in the study of the economic, social, institutional and psychological factors which, in the United States, influence size of family. Such studies are essential to finding out how social conditions might be modified, not only to bring about voluntary changes in the general birth rate, but also to bring about discriminating differentials in births as between individual couples of different genetic constitutions. It should be the function of the Eugenics Society to stimulate work in this field by holding conferences, by publication, and by such other means as may be at its disposal. Such studies, together with psychological studies on the part played by genetic variations, and on the means of measuring psychological traits, constitute probably the most important fields to which the Society should now give its attention.

Matters of eugenic policy will be increasingly discussed as more knowledge is developed in these fields. It will be the function of the Society to provide opportunities for such discussion through publication and conferences. Sound eugenic policies will not develop in a vacuum. They must grow out of existing knowledge applied to the conditions and mores in particular countries.

### Changing Social Patterns and Eugenic Policies

Habits, culture patterns and institutions which affect reproduction and survival are changing rapidly in the United States. Eugenic policies, if they are to be effective, must anticipate and recognize these changes.

The most basic change is the reduction of deaths prior to the age of reproduction. In the United States over 95 per cent of all children born alive now survive to their thirtieth year. Early death is no longer so great a factor in reducing the survival of the physically or mentally unfit. Eugenic policies will try to find an acceptable substitute for death selection.

Accompanying the reduction in deaths, there is an equally marked trend towards limiting size of family. A study made in 1955 indicates that over 90 per cent of all fecund American couples use some form of family limitation at some period of their married lives. If, as may soon be expected, simpler, cheaper and more acceptable means of family limitation become available, we may approach a society in which all children are quite specifically "wanted" children. This would not of itself make for eugenic trends in births, but it would at least make possible policies for eugenic birth selection based on voluntary controls.

In the United States to-day there is a trend towards equalizing educational opportunities; there is also a trend towards fitting education to the abilities of the individual. There are trends towards an increased social mobility, greater job mobility, and the elimination of fixed hereditary classes. These are all changes which would make it more likely for each individual to find the kind and level of work most appropriate to his genetic potential.

The trend towards more employment of women outside the home offers alternatives

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to childbearing which eugenics programmes will have to take into account.

The circle within which one can choose one's mate is constantly widening in the United States to-day, with a greater possibility of assortative mating. Assortative mating can increase the number of people with particular qualities by changing the distribution of genes. In association with selection it can rapidly change gene frequencies.

With such changes going on, one course open to eugenics is to find, and to further, those institutional arrangements, those social, economic and psychological pressures, which would result in a tendency for individuals to have more or fewer children in proportion to their success or achievement in their particular environment. Eugenic policies of this sort would reach into each social, economic and occupational group, and improve the quality of each. The result would be, not a segregation into superior and inferior classes, but a genetic diversification in the process of adapting to the diverse elements of our society. One could then expect a greater variety of talents, and, hopefully, a constantly higher level in those qualities which have a common tendency towards success in all environments.

Much further research is needed to determine the potential effectiveness of such a selective process, or of alternative eugenic programmes consistent with our laws and institutions. It can probably be assumed that couples with a better than average genetic inheritance, will, more often than not, provide a better than average home environment, by whatever criteria quality is to be judged. If this is indeed the case, eugenic policies would work hand in hand with an improved environment to raise the level of human qualities. There is no conflict between those desiring to raise the level of our genetic inheritance and those desiring to raise the level of our social inheritance.

### Conclusion

The Eugenics Society has a definite and important role to play in the development of population policies within the United States. Where information is lacking, the Society will exert its influence to gain knowledge. Where dissemination of information is poor, the Society will sponsor conferences and encourage publication. And where there is failure to utilize available information, the Society will seek to promote a better understanding of what might be accomplished by the application of existing knowledge.